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THE HEALTH OF YOUNG PERSONS IN MASSACHUSETTS FACTORIES

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Probably few persons realize the scope and significance of the present opportunity for inquiring into the health of young persons in the factories of Massachusetts. It is not generally known that the work is done by physicians who are also hygienists—men familiar not only with industrial conditions, but to a great extent with all sorts of conditions and influences which affect or threaten to affect the public health. When the inspector finds in a factory a young person whose health is poor or whose physical condition is unfit for the work in question, he records facts concerning the child's health and conditions of employment, and advises intelligently whether the child quite unfit for one trade or process may be suited for another, or whether the child should be kept from factory work altogether. Being closely associated with the local health authorities, he confers with them, and, if necessary, assists in the enforcement of regulations to prevent the spread of disease. For example, if a young person in a factory is found to have tuberculosis or appears to be predisposed to that disease, or if the child's family history discloses a recent death from tuberculosis in the household, the inspector calls this fact to the attention of the local health authority, that an agent may visit the family to see that sanitary home conditions are maintained. In this way, unreported cases of tuberculosis have been brought to light.

The advantages of having for factory inspectors and medical advisers to minors, men familiar with local sanitary problems, in touch with local health officials, are proving so great that before long they will be clearly recognized by the public. Moreover, these medical inspectors, known as state inspectors of health, by reporting observations and facts to a central body—the State Board of Health—place it in position to acquire information relative to the sanitation of local communities throughout the commonwealth, including (1)

matters relating to water supplies and sewage, (2) the prevalence of diseases dangerous to public health in home, school house, factory or elsewhere, (3) sanitation of school houses and industrial establishments, and (4) information concerning the health of young persons in factories, *at their work*, and the influence of such occupation upon the health of these minors.

To collect data concerning the health of all young persons of each sex in the factories in Massachusetts is itself a task of considerable magnitude. To consider in addition the possible injurious influences to which minors are exposed in certain trades, occupations or processes, while at their work, makes even greater demands upon the inspectors' time. These facts, taken into consideration with the fact that the duties imposed on the health inspectors are varied, make it obvious that they are handicapped in their study of the health of young persons in relation to occupational diseases.

But were the health inspectors relieved from certain work, as for example, that of inspecting slaughter-houses and provisions, a duty clearly not intended to fall within their province when they were appointed state inspectors of health, there still would be a difficulty impossible to overcome without further legislation. I refer to the lack of proper places for physical examination of young persons whenever, in the opinion of a state inspector of health, such examination is advisable or necessary. This is the most serious handicap in connection with the work of the inspectors, not only because the absence of suitable places for examination of minors means inaccurate and incomplete data concerning their health, but because the absence of accurate and complete data means the impossibility of accurate statistical information to show either the percentage of minors in ill health in our factories, or the percentage of minors whose health is more or less affected as the probable result of injurious influences of different occupations or processes.

To be sure, there is another side to this question, as is shown by the very promising work already accomplished by the inspectors. These officials have obtained a considerable knowledge, and can, in the course of time, obtain full knowledge of the conditions of employment. They point out certain dangers which are avoidable, so that young persons may no longer be subjected to avoidable unhygienic influences; they point out dangers which, while not entirely avoidable, make the occupation unsuited to young persons; and,

finally, they brand as dangerous those processes and trades which from their nature are intrinsically dangerous to health, hence unfit to be followed by boys and girls under eighteen years of age. But with a law providing better convenience for examining young persons, in addition to the present opportunity of observing them at their work, the system would be complete, except for the limited appropriation for carrying out the statute provisions.

An examination of a young person ought to take into account and record general health, personal or family history if important, observations of the minor while at work, fitness for the particular kind of work done, age, sex, height and weight. Such examinations ought to be made with sufficient frequency which, in any trade or process, should not be less often than once a year, and in some occupations or processes, if permitted at all, not less often than twice or three times a year. Under existing conditions so thorough a system can only partially be carried out.

When conditions of ill health or of physical unfitness are discovered, aside from communicable diseases already considered, two courses are open to the health inspectors. They may inform the child's parents, or, if to the child's advantage, his employer. Many have been aided, if not completely relieved, by the willingness of an employer at the suggestion of the health inspector to change their work, and, in some instances, by the interest of employers in paying, in part, for treatment of children found in their employ afflicted with a disease like tuberculosis. On the other hand, in the absence of authority to exclude from factories young persons found in ill health or physically unfit, the parents of the children take but little notice of information and advice given them.

In the school, when such affections as pediculosis, scabies, blepharitis, trachoma, etc., are detected they are vigorously excluded until remedied. Why not in the factory? In the school each child's sight and hearing are tested annually. Why are not the sight and hearing of each young person in a factory tested annually and a judgment formed for each child based on the kind of work done and the conditions under which the work is done? Why should not children in factories receive even greater attention than those in our schools, when many factory children are exposed to influences far more inimical to health than the conditions to which school children are subjected in school rooms and for longer daily periods?